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An Analysis of Catholic Values in “The Power and The Glory”

Abstract

Greene won the Hawthorndon prize for the novel and he came to be known as the writer of international importance. It deals with the eternal issues connected with God, catholic beliefs and the prevailing social condition of the time in Mexico, symbolically through its action and characters. On the prevailing situation, Greene comments: “It was in Mexico too that. I discovered some emotional belief, among the empty and rained churches from which the priests had been excluded.” The worse circumstance of Mexico awakes in him the emotional belief and he sketches catholic characters to present the reality. It is the story of a catholic priest who wanders from one place to another place to survive the persecution. He is devoted to his religious vocation and stealthily performs his religious duties. He believes that God is with him. “God is present in this world and listen to the followers”. (1)

Keywords: Church, Whisky Priest, sainthood, suffering, Grace, Salvation.

The religious persecutions in Mexico left clergies with two options either to run away from the country or to get married. To continue administering the sacraments was to be killed. There is no place for corruption and sinners in the church and religion. The Church and the priests have been outlawed in this state where priests have been captured or escaped from but he is the last remaining priest. He is a corrupt priest who is prone to drink so called ‘the Whisky

Priest' and father of an illegitimate daughter. A.D. Wilshire writes: "The Power and the Glory relates to the story of the last few weeks in the life of a nameless priest before he is caught and shot." (2) He acknowledges that he is a bad priest an alcoholic, yet when he is faced with the choice of saving his life or abandoning his people, he assumes his responsibility as a priest and stays. His logic is that "It was from him too they took God in their mouth, when he was gone it would be as if God in all this space between the sea and the mountains ceased to exist. Wasn't it his duty to stay, even if they despised him even if they murdered for his sake?" (The Power and The Glory p-65) He cannot save himself but he has the responsibility to save the villagers. He is isolated by his vocation. "It hadn't after a while seemed to matter very much, whether he was damned or not, so long as these others were saved" (The Power and The Glory p -70) Story begins with escape of pastor. "He had tried to escape, but he was like the king of a West African tribe, the slave of his people, who many not even lie down in case the winds should fail." (The Power and The Glory p -18)

Priest who flees political persecution through the forests? His flight from a secular force epitomizes all types of unintelligible terror and his flight has a double he is not hunted down simply by the lieutenant. His flight becomes important for other reasons which are seen as more significant. He realizes that though he might escape human laws, he cannot escape the ways of God; he gradually and painfully gains and awareness that it is also a question towards the true understanding of his self and God. Walter Allen States, "the fugitive is not in the least the conventional hero of the adventure story or pursuit." (3) He goes through the trial and trouble as a necessary test on which rests his greatness. He encounters with the strangers such as Mr.Tench, Coral, Maria, Lehr and Calvin in random intervals to emphasize the priest's continual flight from one place to the other. It also serves to intensify the sense of abandonment in the fallen world. His flight strips him of all possible cover and he now has to journey alone, defenseless, even without memories. He is trying to believe in the divine images himself, "I

tell you heaven is here.”(The Power and The Glory p -65) Making his way through the marshy jungles, he begins to realize that God is an inescapable presence and is present in every human image. In full flight from the human law, he is at the same time in quest of the divine law that is neither ambiguous nor arbitrary. The faith he carries is now reinforced under the pressure of pain and becomes a form of repentance. Despite all the pain and anguish, he is aware that “at the center of his own faith there always stood the convincing mystery that we were in God's image.” (The Power and The Glory p-96) He arrives at the affirmation of God's power through the back alleys of darkness; he recognizes God in the prisoners. It is amongst men of the most vile and vicious kind he feels a sense of identification in the prison where amongst other things “he is touched by an extra-ordinary affection.”(4) Only through suffering does he come to recognize the particularity of goodness. The collaboration between realism and spirituality is a form of recognition of the ultimate surrender. He cannot escape God any more than he can escape his being hunted down by the lieutenant. He becomes “capable of heroism to which as a comfortable cleric he could never have attained.”(5) The priest is betrayed and suffered death for the sins of the flesh, and redeems his own failure by saving his daughter's soul.

The lieutenant, who also stands nameless, is the hunter, the pursuer who chases the priest. His anti-clericalism is, therefore, impersonal. The lieutenant remains untouched by any form of divine grace and he cannot even comprehend what divinity can mean. The lieutenant is hunted down by his own standards and enmeshed in his own ideologies of secular justice; the priest, in spite of being the more hunted, both physically and spiritually, frees himself from bondage by being absolutely given to damnation and is capable of arriving at sainthood. “One of the greatest mysteries of the spiritual world is the communion of all man in evil and in good, the communion of saints and sinners -- for we are never alone, as the whisky-priest knew. We share responsibility for our sins, as we also share love; our destiny is linked with that of other men”. (6)

The nature of struggle and flight of the priest is suggested by David Lodge, “With elaborate irony, enforcing the novel's thesis, the lieutenant of police appears in every respect, except faith, much more like an ideal priest. He is chaste, honest, ascetic and dedicated.”(7) He is obsessed with the idea of introducing a church of the people, without any of the faith, superstition and hope, but based on the materialistic need of the people. His complete unrestrained humanity saves him from eternal damnation, whereas the lieutenant's unflinching pragmatism does not allow any such scope at all. Even on the way to the execution, the priest says, “I do not think martyrs are like this,” (The Power and The Glory p - 190) suggesting the possibility that he can also be a saint. The priest reflects a true spirit that goes beyond conventional religious attitudes, because he is able to observe beauty even in suffering and corruption. The lieutenant, however, maintains a balanced Puritanism and his ideology turns into strictly conventional attitude. He is the idealistic police officer who only stifles life in his pursuit of eradicating suffering, and the priest in his immense suffering continues to pass life on. The emergence of another priest in the state, a little later after the priest's execution, only reaffirms the view that the priest along with becoming a martyr is regenerated through death. He perpetuates the importance of faith, and no matter how hard the lieutenant may try, he cannot eradicate the faith in religion. Violence and hate is the root of his dogma and he must fulfill them, whereas the priest stands in all his humility, love and charity even in his corruption. Terry Eagleton states, “the whisky priest is revealed as superior to bourgeois pieties by virtue of his humane compassion but superior to humanism by virtue of his identification with orthodox piety.” (8)

The novel arranges the saintly conversion of offender into a saint and a martyr with starting of the story. “Indeed the corruption of mankind is a sort of backhanded tribute to God; it is even a form of goodness to be corrupt; or at least to be corrupt does not deprive us of a form of Godliness”. (9) Religious impulses in the novel do not or challenge the human values.

The transformation makes him not merely human but automatically superhuman. In the mystical death of the priest purified of this sins and attains spiritual expansion.

Thus the novel deals with serious religions theme. The novels of Greene show his preoccupation, which is almost on obsession, with the theme of evil in this world. The theme of *The Power and the Glory* is of course, the conflict between the church and the state and the victory of the church. Therefore, the priest will be ultimately forgiven by God and received in Heaven. Thus in several ways Greene has turned the traditional view upside. God operates mysteriously apart from the church's body dogma. His execution has implication to the crucifixion of Christ. "The power and the glory is Greene grappling with the authority of the institutional church. How does an institution that determines right and wrong, damnation and salvation deals with the ambiguity of life? Greene does not believe that there can be a clear definition between good and evil". (10) Greene presents the priest's sacrifice with the question. Is he worthy of salvation? Does the sinner become a saint?

Greene probes this problem of salvation and damnation through the priest's murder. When the Whisky Priest is ultimately captured and sentenced to death, the morning of his martyrdom, he is too drunk to recite the Act of Contrition and has been refused a confession. The priest approaches his death with his soul in a condition of lethal crime. The narrator relays the priest's thoughts: "He was not at the moment afraid of damnation. He felt only an immense disappointment because he had to go to God empty-handed, with nothing done at all. It seemed to him, at that moment, that it would have been quite easy to have been a saint. It would only have needed a little self-restraint and a little courage. He felt like someone who has missed happiness by seconds at an appointed place. He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted - to be a saint". (*The Power and The Glory* p-210) The Priest knew what he had to do to become a saint. He knew that the church demanded it of him. Even after risking his life to bring God to the people, he could not overcome his sinful nature. Greene technically

distinguishes that the Whisky Priest is damned, but he leaves sinner's salvation to the mercy of God. "The example of the Whisky Priest, he approaches the hope that God's mercy prevails above the authority of the church." (The Power and The Glory p -718) His life with church teaching is still worthy of salvation. Greene challenges the church to save him, and if it will not then he turns to God. If God cannot save the rebels and the sinners, and then hope cannot exist. Greene has shown the survival of the church even after his death in the form of the arriving of a new priest in the village. Thus the novel deals with a serious religious theme and based on catholic beliefs. Andre Maurois emphasizes that it is not common story and he says: "story is allied to the metaphysical depth of a Catholic novel." (11)

Thus the priest dies for the sake of his faith, though he is a sinful man he accepted symbolically as a martyr. He is equated with to Jesus Christ who sacrifices for the others. "Christianity is a monotheistic religion whose devotee believes that Jesus is the son of God and their savior". (12) He has realize the worth of love, "He had given away to despair and out of that had emerged a human soul and love, not the divine love, but love all the same." (The Power and The Glory p-195) The whiskey priest also sacrifices his life while hearing the confession of a dying man. He prays for the salvation of other. The last sacrifices raise him to the height of a martyr. Soon after the death of the priest another priest secretly enters in a mysterious way that indicates both power and the glory belongs to God.

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